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FILE ONLY**COVER STORY**

Experts see big holes in kidnap story

5 CIA agents 'would have gone out of their way to make him comfortable'

By Timothy McQuay
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Can we believe a spy? Vitaly Yurchenko wants us to. He claims the CIA kidnapped him, drugged him, stashed him in a house in Virginia and interrogated him for months to wrest vital secrets from him.

U.S. government officials are split on his true motives — cold feet, CIA bungling, KGB mole — but they agree the kidnapping story is a lie.

The reason: Spies ready to renounce Moscow are treated with kid gloves.

"The idea of some sort of prison is absurd," said Jonathan Haslam of Johns Hopkins University. "They would have gone out of their way to make him comfortable."

The way Western agents encourage such defectors to spill their secrets willingly, said Haslam, are "the softentherm-up technique. . . . Dish out the whiskey, rooms with plush carpets. The safe houses are patrolled, but in a discreet fashion. Of course, the entire house would be bugged. Wherever he's talking, at the bar or in the bathroom, there will be a transcript."

Dealing with a defector is tricky, said former CIA director William Colby. "A defector is highly emotional. You want to calm him down. You take him to a place where he'll be safe, feel protected."

He's put in a friendly environment — to keep him talking. "There's the initial story, and then questions, questions, questions," said Colby. "The polygraph is used at least once. It can particularly tell if someone is holding something back."

Haslam said Yurchenko would have provided "gossip and information on a shopping list of personalities. It's often the most dangerous information. What is the Achilles heel of superiors? How much is known about U.S. intelligence?"

Lawrence Martin, now a Boston University professor, went through CIA debriefing after his 1968 defection. In his earlier life, he was Ladislav Bittman, a major in Czechoslovakian intelligence.

Debriefing "is not a period of physical suffering. It's a very nice, luxury environment," said Martin, who lived in a safe-house with his wife.

"It is hard work," said Martin. "The government wants details of your intelligence service, structure and personnel. It's normally about eight hours a day. You have nights and weekends to relax."

The defector is counseled about the future "to help him through psychological loneliness," said Colby. And there is entertainment "or else they'd go stir crazy." Some choices: "Some like long walks in the country. Some like a nightclub."

Reports of Yurchenko's getaway are "entirely plausible. After three months in a safehouse, Yurchenko would go out to have dinner some night," said Georgetown University's Roy Godson, a consultant to the National Security Council. "Of course, in the company of people handling him and supposedly watching out for him."

The only case of "hostile interrogation" Godson recalls involved Yuri Nosenko, a KGB major who defected in 1964 and was "locked up in a cold room, deprived of baths." The CIA was divided on whether Nosenko was a defector or plant. He claimed to have information that Lee Harvey Oswald had no connection to Soviet intelligence.

But even with soft treatment, a change of mind is not unknown. Soviet newspaper editor Oleg Bittov re-defected in 1984. Bittov also held a news conference — in Moscow — charging he'd been kidnapped and drugged. Godson said interviews with the editor convinced him Bittov "was lonely."

But why did Yurchenko suddenly take refuge in the Soviet Embassy?

■ **Jilted-lover theory.** Yurchenko had a girlfriend in Canada, reportedly the wife of a Soviet diplomat. While she was attracted to Yurchenko the daring KGB chief, she became less than thrilled with Yurchenko the culture-shocked defector, and cut off the affair. Left with neither a girlfriend nor a job, Yurchenko decided to go back to his family and country.

■ **CIA gaffe theory.** Some senators think the CIA tried to take too much credit in the Yurchenko case and embarrassed him with press leaks.

■ **Lonely defector theory.** Some analysts say his CIA keepers should have been aware he was wavering in his decision, isolated from friends and family, dodging the initial guilt and depression all defectors face.

Yurchenko "became terribly homesick," Martin believes. "He realized he'd never see his relatives, his (16-year-old) son, again."

■ **Planted-defector theory.** The KGB, stung by recent major defections, planned a phony to embarrass the CIA and President Reagan on the eve of the Geneva summit. By this theory, Yurchenko only needed to string along the CIA until an opportune moment.

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■ **Honest Russian theory.** This one presumes that Yurchenko is telling the truth about the CIA stooping to kidnapping and drugs. Tired of being mistreated, he sneaked away and the CIA is scrambling to cover its tracks.

■ **KGB "mole" theory.** The most byzantine of all, this theory assumes Yurchenko was sincere when he defected last August. But, after giving up some Soviet secrets, he realized he would always be a hunted man as long as he remained a known defector. So he agreed to go back to the Soviets as a double-agent, with a cover story that he was kidnapped. If true, he'll continue to spy for the USA from within until his cover or the Soviet government collapses.

The truth will not be known soon, if ever. One thing is certain: the real-life drama of Yurchenko is the best spy thriller in a year of espionage spectacles.

Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, member of the Senate intelligence panel, said in the spy business, "You are dropped into a wilderness of mirrors... there are so many layers and levels of deceit built into intelligence operations, designed to confuse your adversaries."

In the wilderness of Washington's high-priced restaurants, the Yurchenko caper was hot gossip. "Some people think he was dining here, but he wasn't," said Lourdes Alvarez of Duke Zeibert's Restaurant. "We asked the waiters and no one remembers seeing him here."

Mel Krupin, whose dining establishment also attracts the capitol's political and social elite, said the latest spy chapter could have taken place anywhere.

Over dinner and drinks, he said, "You can't tell a good spy from a bad spy."

Contributing: Patrick O'Driscoll, Michelle Healy

Was USA, or spy, rooked?

We may never know the real reason behind Soviet spy Vitaly Yurchenko's decision to return to the Soviet Union, but these are the theories:



JILTED LOVER: He decided to go home because a love in Canada, whom he defected for, dropped him.



KGB MOLE: The fear of knowing he would be hunted by the KGB was too much to bear.



CIA GAFFE: He was red-faced because of CIA leaks to the press and decided to get out.



PLANTED DEFECTOR: The defection was a phony ploy to embarrass the USA prior to the Geneva summit.



HONEST RUSSIAN: He was really drugged, kidnapped and tortured by the CIA — and escaped.